Double-flowered Fig Buttercup, or Lesser Celandine. (*Ficaria verna*, Flore Pleno Group, *Ranunculus ficaria* ‘Flore Pleno’)

Is April, out of the 12 months of the year, really the month when the most trees and shrubs are in bloom, or does it just seem to be? It could very well be the most floriferous month, with the carpets of bulbs added. With the wealth of flowering starting in March, it is hard to find a feature plant that Master Gardeners are not familiar with.

Perennials, for the most part, are just coming up, and it may be that this one is new to you. It took a lot of research to find this double, groundcover type buttercup, and even now it seems to be listed with two botanical names. Most of the sources listed the single, spreading, aggressive buttercup with warnings about its thuggish ways. The double-flowered one has been very mannerly in my Oxford garden for three seasons, spreading in size from a little larger than a fifty-cent coin to a patch about the size of a teacup saucer. It arises from tiny bulb-like tuberous roots to form rosettes of shiny green leaves topped with yellow flowers that are also shiny, all under 6” tall. It starts blooming in March and extends well into April, and it does not set seeds. It grows well in light shade in moist, organic soil, and is summer dormant. Plant it near a walk so you will look forward to its appearance in March, then to the procession of flowers through April.

**CHECKLIST FOR APRIL,**
By Mary Jane Bosworth, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

*There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments. Janet Kilburn Phillips*

- April is the best time to plant warm-season grasses (bermuda, centipede, zoysia and St. Augustine).
- Prune Azaleas AFTER flowering.
- Prune berry producing shrubs, such as hollies, in flower to prevent removal of all the berries.
- Spray roses every 7-10 days until frost, beginning with the onset of new growth.
- Control aphids on roses with insecticidal soap.
- Apply pre-emergent herbicides to reduce spring-germinating weeds.
- Perennial plants should be planted to become established before hot weather hits.
- Once the ground has warmed up you can seed summer annuals.
- Mulch well to prepare for summer heat and prevent weeds.
- Experiment with watering devices to conserve water. Soaker hoses, drip irrigation systems and timers will help deliver water to plants in an efficient manner.
GARDEN TO DO – APRIL,
By Carl Shafer, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Maintain your spray program for apples, nectarines, peaches, and plums. Follow label instructions and observe waiting times before harvest. See NC Chem. Manual for more information.

Apples, nectarines, peaches, and pears need to be thinned to produce the best crop of full sized fruit. Fruit should be thinned by the time they are nickel size so that they are spaced 4 to 8 inches apart along the branch.

If you have blueberries, cherries, or strawberries, have bird netting ready unless you want to share your crop. If you are thinking of starting or expanding small fruit plantings, it is getting late for bare root plants, but local retailers have many container-grown plants. Before buying, check that varieties are appropriate for this area. Everbearing and day neutral strawberries are not recommended for this area because of the summer heat.

Avoid working in your garden when the soil is wet. A late planting of cool season vegetables can be tried this month. As long as we do not have an early hot spell, you will get a late harvest. Try to provide partial afternoon shade by planting on the east side of tall plants or by using shade cloth on hoops or other frames.

If possible avoid planting related vegetables in the same location more often than once every three years. This will help prevent the buildup of insect and disease problems.

“Warm weather” vegetables (Green beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, melons, squash, and tomatoes) can be planted after the average last frost date in mid – April. Wait until May for “Hot weather” vegetables (Lima beans, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, and sweet potatoes). See Home Vegetable Gardening AG-06 for fertilizing and pest control recommendations. If you just cannot wait, make only a small planting and have frost protection handy. While this year, late winter and early spring temperatures have been quite warm, the average high temperature in our area goes from about 56 F March 1st to 67 F April 1st to 75 F May 1st. The corresponding low temperature goes from about 29 F March 1st to 37 F April 1st to 46 F May 1st. To get the range in which 2 out of 3 years are expected to fall; for high temperatures, add and subtract 11 F for March and April and 9 F for May, for low temperatures use 9 F for all three months.


For a complete listing of NCSU Extension Publications for Lawn and Garden, see www.ces.ncsu.edu/Publications/lawngarden.php

The free gardening magazine, Triangle Gardener, is now available in Henderson at the Library and Rose-Gin.

Some interesting web sites:

www.nctomatoman.weebly.com – Check out “Dwarf Tomato Project” under ”more”.


www.hometalk.com – Home & Garden blog.

www.all-americaselections.org – All-America Selection web site.

www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/index.htm – Chatham Co. Ag. Extension Agent Debbie Roos’ web site.

Garden Rant, (www.gardenrant.com/) Two posts on the partnering of the National Wildlife Federation and Scotts Miracle-Gro. Also see the post on San Francisco’s plan to start shifting responsibility for maintaining of street trees to the property owner.

post on the new USDA Plant Hardiness Map. Also see the call for publishing “negative results”.

www.plantdelights.com/January/products/877/ Newsletter. After a brief discussion about the winter weather to date, Tony gives an inside look at the development of the new USDA Plant Hardiness Map. He served on the USDA technical review committee. Also see the February Newsletter for a follow-up on the new map.

www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~linda%20chalker-scott
See Horticultural Myths.

INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR APRIL,
By Marty Finkel, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Gazanias are easy to grow in very well-drained soil, all-day sun, and they are drought tolerant. A relatively new series, Sunbathers, has a new feature: since the flowers are semi-double, they don’t close at night. They come in four colors, Gold Coast, Sunset, Moonlight, and Malibu and are nearly 6” across. The mature plants will be about 12” tall and have a rosette of thick foliage about 15” wide. Deadheading will keep the plant blooming. Application of a controlled-release fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks is recommended. These plants are excellent choices for containers.

There was a gorgeous new coleus collection, Hort Couture’s Under the Sea, with names such as Bone Fish, Hermit Crab, Shrimp, Molten Coral, Sea Scallop, and others displayed at the Green and Growing trade show in Greensboro in January. The vendor said they will not be found in box stores, but several area nurseries will carry the line. They are truly different and will be stunning in container mixes as well as garden beds.

HERB OF THE MONTH,
By Edna Gaston, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Santolina
S. chamaecyparissus. – Lavender Cotton or Gray Santolina
S. virens – Green Santolina

Height: Both are low growing, about 2 ft. tall
Flowers: Both have yellow flowers
Propagation: seeds (slow), cuttings root easily, layering during the summer
Growing conditions: full sun, tolerates (and appreciates) dry areas
Cultivation: As with most herbs these plants need little fertilizer, plants can easily be trimmed but do not heavily trim in hot weather
Uses: perfumes, extremely good for knot gardens, potpourri, natural dye

HISTORY:
As with most herbs, Santolina has its origins in the Mediterranean area. With the development of trade routes, it spread to England. There is found wide-spread use in beautiful knot gardens. By shaping in spring then lightly trimming through the growing season either the green or gray variety found a new home. Or both can be used for appealing contrasts.

This plant makes a nice specimen plant in an herb garden or any place in the garden. Its fragrance is slightly reminiscence of true lavender. It makes a nice edging for walkways or in the front of a flower bed. Leaves have a feathery appearance, a nice contract to most foliage.

Plant and enjoy!
Additional Information:


WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK A QUESTION,
By Edna Gaston, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

A couple of years ago, I was talking with the 4-H agent in Vance County, Pam Jones. I told her that some of my volunteer activities were over and did she have any projects where she needed help. Her response was an emphatic YES. She had long dreamed of taking horticultural programs to third graders and was I interested? This hit a responsive cord with me – in a past life I had conducted programs depicting 1870’s activities so I was ready!

With the help of Pam Jones and Paul McKenzie, Horticultural Extension Agent for Vance/Warren Counties, plans were underway. A school in Vance County was contacted, activities developed, a request sent out to other Kerr Lake Master Gardeners for help who enthusiastically responded and we were on our way!

Four topics were developed: seeds, soil, pollination and compost / recycling. Each session begins with questions to the students. For seeds typical questions are: What does a seed need to grow? What is seed germination? What are the parts of a seed? Prior to the soil properties activities, we ask: Why is soil important? What are the different types of soil?

What does soil feel like? What is the difference between soil and dirt? Next come the birds and the bees – pollination. What are the parts of a flower? What is the functions of the flower?, How is a flower pollinated? What pollinates flowers? The final topic is recycling and compost. We emphasize the importance of not littering, why recycling is important, what can and can’t be recycled, how long it takes things to decompose, what is compost and how it improves the soil while discussing how much topsoil has been lost through the centuries via erosion.

After the initial discussion of the questions, a hands-on activity is done. These include “Soil Sam” which lets the students watch seeds sprout, building a bioreactor to observe decomposition, taking apart a flower to identify its parts, determine what should be recycled, composted or put into the trash bin, pouring water through sand, clay and humus to observe the flow and analyze why the times are different.

At the end of the school year, we have a wrap-up session and party with each class – we have now delivered these programs to schools in both Vance County and Warren County. We try to show how all of the session are related – seeds go into the improved soil, plants sprout and bloom, flowers are pollinated, seeds are formed and saved, garden scraps are composted and the compost added to improve the soil so we can sow the seeds next year. The cycle starts again! It is so exciting to see how much the students retain, how quickly they can answer the questions we posed at the time we first presented each session and how they see the relationship. Then we finish with snacks and beverages.

This program has been very rewarding for the teachers as we help to reinforce what they are teaching, beneficial to the students to give them some additional hands-on activities which we hope makes learning fun and to us as Master Gardeners. What better way to learn material than to need to present the information. We as Master Gardeners must prove we are smarter than a third grader. They do keep us on our toes.
What progress we have made in the two years we have been presenting our programs. Next year we hope to give the programs to all third graders at each participating school. And we hope to eventually expand to more schools – but we will need lots of help. Some Master Gardeners are at every program, some go to all programs at one of the schools, some specialize in one of the programs but together we get it done. With the leadership of Pam Jones, 4-H agent in Vance County, Erin Bain, 4-H agent in Warren County Paul McKenzie in both counties and the hard work in so many ways of all the Kerr Lake Master Gardeners this program is a success!

And this is what happens when you ask a question!

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Pictures courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum